

Message Text

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INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 NSC-05 NSCE-00 PM-03 SP-02
IO-06 EUR-08 L-01 INR-05 CIAE-00 ACDA-10 /065 W
-----009896 301723Z /46

R 292325Z JUN 77
FM AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6580
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INFO USCINCSO//J-2-IO//
AMCONSUL BELIZE
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MEXICO
AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA
USUN NEW YORK 601

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 4 GUATEMALA 4113

LIMDIS

LONDON, MEXICO AND TEGUCIGALPA ALSO FOR DATTS

E.O. 11652 GDS
TAGS: MPOL, PBOR, GT, BH, UK
SUBJ: ASSESSMENT OF GUATEMALAN MILITARY CAPABILITY TO INVADE
BELIZE

1. SUMMARY: MISSION DOES NOT BELIEVE GUATEMALAN ATTACK ON
BELIZE IS IMMINENT. WE BELIEVE SIGNALS THAT MIGHT BE READ
AS PREPARATION FOR ATTACK ARE INSTEAD A CALCULATED ATTEMPT
BY GOG TO INFLUENCE BRITISH POLICY AND THE JULY TALKS.
HOWEVER, SHOULD GOG DECIDE THAT NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT IS
IMPOSSIBLE AND MILITARY ACTION ONLY WAY TO FORCE SETTLEMENT,
GUATEMALAN ARMED FORCES COULD MOUNT ON SHORT NOTICE EITHER
A CONVENTIONAL ATTACK, PROBABLY AIMED AT CAPTURE OF TOWN OF
PUNTA GORDA, OR A QUIET INFILTRATION OF RANGER UNITS.

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OBJECTIVE WOULD BE EFFECTIVE CONTROL OF AS MUCH AS
POSSIBLE OF AREA SOUTH OF MONKEY RIVER AND, EXCEPT FOR
POSSIBILITY OF A FEINT, MISSION BELIEVES ACTION NORTH
OF THAT LINE IS UNLIKELY. GOG IS AWARE THAT OAS, UN,
AND USG WOULD SEEK TO END HOSTILITIES IMMEDIATELY, BUT
IT WOULD HOPE - A LA ISRAEL AND TURKEY - TO PRESENT
THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY WITH A FAIT ACCOMPLI FROM

WHICH IT COULD NOT EASILY BE DISLODGED. END SUMMARY

2. MISSION HAS RECEIVED NO INDICATION OF GUATEMALAN MILITARY ACTION AGAINST BELIZE PRIOR TO NEXT MEETING OF GUATEMALAN, BRITISH, AND BELIZEAN NEGOTIATORS SCHEDULED FOR JULY 6-7 IN WASHINGTON. THE SIGNS WE HAVE SEEN WHICH MIGHT BE READ AS PREPARATION FOR EARLY MILITARY ACTION- THE TRAINING OF RESERVES, THE CURRENT MANEUVERS, THE INCREASINGLY BELLICOSE NATURE OF GOG STATEMENTS - ARE, IN THE MISSION VIEW, PART OF A CALCULATED ATTEMPT BY THE GOG TO INFLUENCE BRITISH POLICY - TO PREVENT A BREAKOFF OF TALKS AND ANY MOVE TOWARD GRANTING INDEPENDENCE TO BELIZE. THE GREATEST GUATEMALAN FEAR IS AN ABRUPT MOVE TOWARD INDEPENDENCE WHICH WOULD CATCH THEM UNAWARES. PUBLIC REPORTS ON THE RECENT COMMONWEALTH MEETING AND THE PRIVATE ACQUISITION BY THE GOG OF ACCURATE INFORMATION ON BRITISH PLANS FOR STARTING THE INDEPENDENCE PROCESS HAVE GREATLY INCREASED THAT FEAR.

3. EVEN IF THE WASHINGTON TALKS BREAK OFF WITHOUT PROGRESS TOWARD SETTLEMENT, IMMEDIATE GUATEMALAN MILITARY ACTION IS UNLIKELY. DECISION TO COMMIT GUATEMALAN FORCES TO BATTLE FOR FIRST TIME THIS CENTURY IS NOT ONE PRESIDENT LAUGERUD WOULD TAKE WITHOUT CAREFUL CONSIDERATION OF ALTERNATIVES AND CONSULTATION WITH HIS MILITARY AND CIVILIAN ADVISERS. AT LEAST SOME OF LAUGERUD'S

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ADVISERS ARE LIKELY TO URGE THAT GUATEMALA TAKE NO ACTION UNTIL UK EITHER ANNOUNCES THE BEGINNING OF INDEPENDENCE PROCESS FOR BELIZE, OR SUPPORTS A CALL FOR IMMEDIATE INDEPENDENCE BY THIS YEAR'S UNGA. SHOULD UK FAIL TO TAKE EITHER STEP THERE WOULD BE NO NEED FOR GUATEMALAN ACTION.

4. HOWEVER, THERE WILL ALSO BE ADVISERS WHO WILL ARGUE THE ADVANTAGES OF A SURPRISE ATTACK, AND IF LAUGERUD IS CONVINCED THAT THERE IS NO PROSPECT FOR FURTHER NEGOTIATION AND THAT THE ONLY WAY TO FORCE BRITAIN BACK TO THE NEGOTIATING TABLE IS MILITARY ACTION, HE COULD AUTHORIZE AN INVASION OF BELIZE. WE BELIEVE LAUGERUD WOULD ANTICIPATE THAT THE USG MIGHT LEARN OF SUCH A DECISION, AND IT IS EVEN POSSIBLE THAT HE MIGHT ENSURE THAT WE LEARN OF IT IN ORDER TO SEEK TO EXTRACT A COMMITMENT FOR AN INCREASED US MEDIATING OR INTERMEDIARY ROLE IN RETURN FOR ANY GUATEMALAN COMMITMENT NOT TO INVADE.

5. THE PURPOSE OF THIS MESSAGE, HOWEVER, IS TO ASSUME THE GOG MIGHT PROCEED WITH MILITARY ACTION AGAINST BELIZE, DESPITE US OPPOSITION, AND TO GIVE A COORDINATED MISSION ASSESSMENT OF THE

GUATEMALAN ARMED FORCES' CAPABILITY TO CARRY OUT SUCH AN ORDER
AND OUR ESTIMATE OF THE PROBABLE FORM AND LOCATION OF THE ATTACK.

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-----010177 301722Z /46

R 292325Z JUN 77
FM AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA
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DIA WASHDC
HQ DA WASHDC//DAMI-FI//
INFO USCINCSO//J-2-IO//
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S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 4 GUATEMALA 4113

LIMDIS

6. BACKGROUND: SINCE THE FALL OF 1975, WHEN THE
GUATEMALAN ARMED FORCES WERE MOVING MILITARY MATERIEL
AND EQUIPMENT INTO THE PETEN DEPARTMENT AND GIVING RISE
TO FEARS THAT AN INVASION OF BELIZE MIGHT BE CONTEMPLATED,
THERE HAS BEEN NO INDICATION OF ANY MOVE TO INVADE. NEVERTHELESS,
DURING THE PAST TWO YEARS THE MILITARY HAVE MADE IMPROVEMENTS AND
HAVE TRAINED FOR AN INCURSION INTO BELIZE. THE EARTHQUAKE OF 1976
SET GUATEMALA ON A COURSE OF RECONSTRUCTION AND LESSENER TENSIONS
IN THE GUATEMALA-BELIZE DISPUTE. ONCE THE RECONSTRUCTION EFFORT
WAS WELL UNDER WAY THERE REAPPEARED THE INTEREST IN REGAINING
BELIZE WHICH HAS ONCE AGAIN PEAKED IN MILITARY AND POLITICAL CIRCLES.

7. DURING THE PAST TWO YEARS THE GUATEMALANS, REALIZING THE
POTENTIAL OF THE BRITISH TO RETALIATE SUCCESSFULLY IN THE EVENT OF
AN ALL-OUT WAR, HAVE APPEARED TO BE PREPARING THEIR ARMED FORCES
FOR THE CONTINGENCY OF A LIMITED INVASION OF BELIZE.

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A. TRAINING HAS BEEN QUITE INTENSIVE IN THE RANGER SCHOOL AT LA POLVORA (1701N-8920W) (KAIBIL COURSE) AND THE GRADUATING CLASSES HAVE ENABLED THEM TO BUILD UP MORE THAN A COMPANY OF TANGERS, UTILIZING OTHER GRADUATES AS CADRE IN THE MILITARY ZONES THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY TO START MINI-COURSES IN KAIBIL TRAINING; THE RESULT - A MUCH BETTER TRAINED AND HARDENED ARMY THAN IN 1975.

B. THE PARACHUTE BATTALION LOCATED AT SAN JOSE (1355N-9049W) HAS CONCENTRATED ON TRAINING POINTED TOWARD MASS JUMPS. WHEREAS IN 1975 THEY COULD NOT JUMP A COMPANY-SIZED UNIT DUE TO LACK OF TRAINING AND LOGISTICAL SUPPORT, THE PARACHUTE BATTALION HAS NOW DEVELOPED THE CAPABILITY TO DROP AT LEAST A COMPANY-SIZED UNIT, HAS HAD INTENSIVE PRACTICE IN THE PAST FEW MONTHS IN AIR DROPS, AND POSES A FORMIDABLE FORCE. NEVERTHELESS, THEY STILL HAVE SEVERE LIMITATIONS IN THE AIR DROP OF EQUIPMENT AS WELL AS PROBLEMS WITH THE USE OF THE GALIL RIFLE DURING/AFTER AN AIR DROP.

C. THE GUATEMALA AIR FORCE (GAF) HAS INCREASED ITS INVASION CAPABILITY ALMOST TWO-FOLD SINCE 1975. ITS AIR DROP CAPABILITY HAS BEEN INCREASED BY ALMOST 100 PER CENT FY THE ADDITIONAL PURCHASE OF THREE C-47'S AND TEN ARAVAS, ALL TRANSPORT AIRCRAFT. THEROETICALLY, IF ALL TRANSPORT AIRCRAFT WERE USED SIMULTANEOUSLY, TWO COMPANIES OF AIRBORNE TROOPS COULD BE DROPPED AT POINTS THROUGHOUT BELIZE. SOME OF THE TRANSPORT AIRCRAFT, SUCH AS THE ARAVAS, COULD THEN BE USED FOR MEDICAL EVACUATION AND/OR FOLLOW-UP DELIVERIES OF HEAVY EQUIPMENT.

D. THE GUATEMALAN NAVY HAS ADDED FIVE PATROL BOATS DURING THE PAST YEAR TO THEIR INVENTORY AND HAVE HAD EXTENSIVE TRAINING IN LANDING EXERCISES INVOLVING THE USE OF MARINES.

E. THE MILITARY RESERVES, AN ILL-TRAINED AND NOT OFTEN USED GROUP IN GUATEMALA, HAVE BEEN CALLED UP FOR LIMITED TRAINING IN ALL OF THE MILITARY ZONES. THE FORCE ITSELF WOULD NOT BE EFFECTIVE IN BATTLE BUT THE SIGNIFICANT FACTOR IS THAT THEY COULD PERFORM
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THE NORMAL "HOUSEKEEPING" FUNCTIONS OF THE REGULAR ARMY IF THE REGULARS WERE NEEDED IN THE AREA ADJACENT TO BELIZE OR IN AN ACTUAL INVASION.

F. THE ARMY HAS OBTAINED 15,000 GALIL RIFLES FROM ISRAEL. THIS IS SIGNIFICANT IN THAT THE RESERVES CAN BE OUTFITTED WITH THE M-1 RIFLE WHICH HAS BEEN USED BY THE REGULARS.

G. THE PROPAGANDA WITHIN THE ARMED FORCES THAT BELIZE IS TO BE RETAKEN HAS BEEN KEPT AT A HIGH PITCH. THE GENERAL STAFF IS A PRIME MOVER FOR SOME FORM OF MILITARY ACTION.

8. CONSIDERING THE FOREGOING PREPARATIONS OF THE ARMED

FORCES WE MAY MAKE THE FOLLOWING ASSUMPTIONS CONCERNING
WHAT THE GUATEMALAN "GAME PLAN" FOR AN ALL-OUT ATTACK MIGHT BE LIKE:

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R 292325Z JUN 77
FM AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA
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S E C R E T SECTION 3 OF 4GUATEMALA 4113

LIMDIS

A. MILITARY OBJECTIVE IS PUNTA GORDA (1660N-8848W) AND THE LAND
AREA SOUTH OF MONKEY RIVER. CUT HIGHWAY FROM PUNTA GORDA TO NORTH.
ISOLATE OR WIPE OUT BRITISH OUTPOSES, SUCH AS THAT NEAR SAN
ANTONIO (1616N-8902W).

B. GUATEMALAN MILITARY WOULD MAKE ASSAULT WITH A COMBINED
LAND/SEA/AIRDROP FORCE. LAND FORCE WOULD BE
LARGELY FOR INFILTRATION OF SOUTHERN BELIZE WITH PERHAPS A
FEINT IN THE NORTH ALONG THE BELMOPAN-BELIZE
CITY HIGHWAY. AIRDROP WOULD BE LARGELY IN THE SOUTH WITH PUNTA
GORDA A PRIME TARGET. ACQUISITION OF AN AIRSTRIP(S) WOULD BE
IMPORTANT FOR SUBSEQUENT ARAVA/HELICOPTER LANDINGS. AIR STRIKES
BY A-37 AIRCRAFT WOULD PROBABLY BE MADE, POSSIBLY EVEN AGAINST BE-
LIZE AIRPORT. NAVY WOULD LAND TROOPS ALONG SOUTHERN COAST OF
BELIZE.

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C. MILITARY FORCES WOULD MAKE AND COMPLET MAJORIT OF THEIR MOVES WITHIN 72 HOURS.

9. IN THE EVENT A LIMITED ATTACK WERE ORDERED INSTEAD OF ALL-OUT HOSTILITIES WE WOULD ASSUME THERE WOULD PROBABLY BE MINOR INFILTRATION ALONG THE SOUTHWESTERN BORDER OF BELIZE WITH AN OBJECTIVE OF HARASSMENT AND LIMITED SATISFACTION OF POLITICAL/MILITARY PRESSURE WITHIN GUATEMALA. THE ARMY IS ESPECIALLY WELL-TRAINED FOR THIS TYPE OF OFFENSIVE AND MIGHT INFLUENCE THE GOG TO SUCH AN ATTACK SINCE AN ALL-OUT ATTACK IS VIEWED BY MANY GUATEMALANS AS SUICIDAL DUE TO BRITISH CAPABILITY FOR REPRISAL (E.G. HARRIER AIRCRAFT).

10. LAND CAPABILITY:

A. TWO MILITARY ZONES/BASES FORM A BOUNDARY AROUND BELIZE AT POPTUN (1621N-8926W) AND PUERTO BARRIOS (1543N-8836W). SANTO TOMAS DE CASTILLA (1542N-8837W) AS WELL AS THE TWO OTHER ZONE HEADQUARTERS COULD PROVIDE STAGING AREAS FOR THE MAJORITY OF ANY LAND MOVES AGAINST BELIZE. THE UNIT AT POPTUN HAS BEEN AUGMENTED TO FOUR COMPANIES, ONE OF WHICH IS A RANGER CO. THIS GIVES A COAPABILTY OF ABOUT 600 MEN FOR AN ADVANCE INTO BELIZE FROM POPTUN. PUERTO BARRIOS HAS THREE COMPANIES WHICH WOULD PROVIDE ABOUT 500 MEN. POPTUN IS SUPPORTED BY A 75 MM PACK HOWITZER AND A 4.2" MORTAR BATTERY; PUERTO BARRIOS BY A 75 MM PACK HOWITZER BATTERY. FROM 8 TO 10 ARMORED CARS (M113'S) ARE IN THE POPTUN MIL ZONE. THE MARINE FORCE AT SANTO TOMAS DE CASTILLA NUMBERS BOUT 150 MEN. IF WE INCLUDE TROOPS FROM WITHIN A REASONABLE DISTANCE OF BELIZE, AS IN THE ZONES/BASES AT COBAN (1528N-9022W) (ABOUT 500 MEN) AND ZACAPA (1458N-8932W) (ABOUT 500 MEN), WE HAVE A THEORETICAL INVASION FORCE BY LAND/SEA/AIR OFO ABOUT 2500 MEN INCLUDING SUPPORT UNITS (E.G. ARTILLERY AND 4.2" MORTARS), WHICH COULD BE FORMED
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RAPIDLY FOR A SURPRISE ATTACK. THIS FORCE EXLCUDES TROOPS FROM THE CAPITAL OR OUTLYING AREAS WHICH COULD AUGMENT THIS FIGURE DURING EXTENDED HOSTILITIES.

11. AIR DROP CAPABILITY: THE PARACHUTE BATTALION HAS THREE COMPANIES OF AIRBORNE INFANTRY. AVAILABLE AIRCRAFT COULD LIFT TWO OF THE COMPANIES AT ONE TIME, OR ABOUT 400 MEN, PRESUMABLY TO SOUTHERN BELIZE, ALTHOUGH BELIZE CITY OR BELMOPAN COULD BE SECONDARY TARGETS. THREE LIFTS COULD PROBABLY BE MADE IN ONE DAY IF ATTACK UTILIZED FEWER NUMBERS OF AIRCRAFT AT ONE TIME. IF PUERTO BARRIOS OR POPTUN WERE USED AS STAGING AREAS, AIRLIFT, TO INCLUDE

USE OF UH-1'S (6NOW; 9 IN NEAR FUTURE), COULD BE
DONE IN ABOUT THREE HOURS. THERE IS NO HEAVY EQUIPMENT
DROP CAPABILITY. ARAVAS COULD LAND SMALL VEHICLES.
HELICOPTERS WOULD PROBABLY BE USED FOR EQUIPMENT RESUPPLY.

12. NAVAL CAPABILITY: THE TWELVE PATROL BOATS AND THE
56-FOOT LANDING CRAFT AT SANTO TOMAS DE CASTILLA COULD
TRANSPORT ABOUT 600 TROOPS. THEY WOULD BE LIMITED BY
WATER DEPTHS, BUT THE TWO 36-FOOTERS CAN GO RIGHT UP TO
SHORE. CRAFT ARE NOT EFFECTIVELY ARMED AS YET, BUT PLANS
FOR EFFECTIVE USE OF LIGHT CANNONS MAY MATERIALIZE IN THE
NEAR FUTURE. IN THE MEANTIME MACHINE GUNS AND 75 MM
RECOILESS RIFLES OFFER THE FIREPOWER. THE THREAT IS NOT IN
FIREPOWER BUT IN TROOP LANDING CAPABILITY. ON BRITISH FRIGATE
COULD PROBABLY KNOCK OUT THE GUATEMALAN NAVY.

13. AIR CAPABILITY: THERE ARE ELEVEN (11) A-37'S WHICH
ARE ASSIGNED TO THE GUATEMALAN LA AURORA (MILITARY BASE)
AIRPORT DIRECTLY ACROSS THE RUNWAY FROM THE INTERNATIONAL TERMINAL
(1438N-9021W) WHICH COULD BE USED FOR TACTICAL AIR SUPPLORT.
MAIN USE WOULD BE AIR TO GROUND STRIKED UTILIZING 500-LB BOMBS.

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-----010534 301720Z /46

R 292325Z JUN 77
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LIMDIS

14. LOGISTICS: THE SIZE OF AN ATTACK FORCE WOULD BE

LIMITED BY LOGISTICAL CAPABILITY. GASOLINE RESERVES IN MILITARY ZONES HAVE BEEN BUILT UP CONSIDERABLY SINCE 1975. TROOPS, IN GENERAL, WOULD CARRY A THREE-DAY SUPPLY OF RATIONS AND BASIC AMMUNITION LOAD. RESUPPLY OF RATIONS BY AIR WOULD BE NO LARGE PROBLEM. GROUND SUPPLY WOULD BE PRACTICALLY NIL BECAUSE OF LACK OF ROADS INTO BELIZE. SUPPLY BY SEA WOULD BE DANGEROUS AND IMPRACTICAL.

15. ROUTES OF APPROACH: ALTHOUGH AN ATTACK COULD BE MADE ON BELIZE FROM THE NORTH OR CENTRAL PORTIONS OF WESTERN BORDER THE LACK OF ADEQUATE ROADS/TRAILS WOULD MAKE THE MOVE SLOW, LACK SURPRISE, AND HAVE NO USEFUL OBJECTIVE. AN ATTACK FROM THE SOUTHERN OR SOUTHWESTERN PORTION OF THE BORDER WOULD BE MORE LOGICAL, ESPECIALLY SINCE TROOPS FROM THE POPTUN GARRISON HAVE BEEN WORKING/SCOUTING IN SECRET

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THIS AREA FOR SEVERAL YEARS.

16. COMMUNICATION/CONTROL:

A. ONE OF THE GREATEST SHORTCOMINGS OF THE GUATEMALAN MILITARY IS LACK OF AN EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM. AIR TO AIR CONTROL IS BAD -- LIMITED FREQUENCIES AND LACK OF KNOWLEDGE BY PILOTS IN RADIO COMMUNICATION. AIR TO GROUND COMMUNICATIONS IS ALMOST NON-EXISTENT. BAD WEATHER CONDITIONS WOULD SET BACK AN AIR FORCE WHICH KNOWS LITTLE OF OR REFUSES TO USE INSTRUMENTS.

B. EFFECTIVE CONTROL OF A MAJOR OPERATION OF THIS KIND IS BEYOND THE CAPABILITY OF THE GENERAL STAFF. NOBODY IS EXPERIENCED IN COORDINATING A COMBINED ARMS ATTACK. THE PRESIDENT AND THE OPERATIONS AND TRAINING PERSONNEL, WITH THEIR U.S. TRAINING, COULD PROBABLY SET UP A GOOD ATTACK PLAN, BUT ONCE IT GOT STARTED THE LACK OF COORDINATION AND EXPERIENCE AMONG THE COMMANDERS AND STAFF WOULD CERTAINLY SET BACK ANY EXTENDED OPERATION.

17. CONCLUSION: THE GUATEMALAN ARMED FORCES CAN ASSAULT PUNTA GORDA ON SHORT NOTICE (3 HOURS BY SEA) PROBABLY ARRIVING IN 72 HOURS BY LAND. THE COMBINED AIR/GROUND/NAVAL FORCE WOULD TOTAL 2500 EFFECTIVES UTILIZING FORCES FROM NEARBY MILITARY ZONES. THE MAIN ATTACK WOULD BE FROM THE SOUTH AND SOUTHWEST. A FEINT MIGHT BE MADE TO THE NORTH UTILIZING ARTILLERY AND ARMORED CARS. ANYTHING SHORT OF AN ALL-OUT ATTACK WOULD PROBABLY BE LIMITED GROUND INFILTRATION INTO THE SOUTHERN PART OF BELIZE

18. POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES OF ATTACK: EXTERNAL. WE BELIEVE GUATEMALAN PLANNING STRESSES THE IMPORTANCE OF QUICK MOVEMENT TOWARD THE OBJECTIVE NOT ONLY BECAUSE OF THE OBVIOUS SUPERIORITY OF BRITISH FORCES, ONCE BROUGHT FULLY TO BEAR,

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BUT ALSO BECAUSE GOG IS AWARE THAT THE OAS AND/OR THE UN, AND SPECIFICALLY THE USG, WOULD SEEK AN IMMEDIATE END TO HOSTILITIES AND A WITHDRAWAL OF INVADING FORCES. IF THE GOG SHOULD NEVERTHELESS INVADE, IT WOULD BE IN THE HOPE THAT IT COULD ESTABLISH ITSELF FIRMLY IN AT LEAST A SMALL AREA OF SOUTHERN BELIZE BEFORE THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY COULD REACT. ONCE ESTABLISHED, GUATEMALA WOULD HOPE THE PRECEDENTS OF ISRAEL AND TURKISH OCCUPIED TERRITORIES WOULD APPLY, AND THAT THE CESSATION OF HOSTILITIES WOULD LEAVE IT IN DE FACTO POSSESSION OF WHAT IT HAD UNSUCCESSFULLY SOUGHT AT THE NEGOTIATING TABLE.

19. INTERNAL CONSEQUENCES. THERE WOULD BE NO PUBLICLY EXPRESSED OPPOSITION TO THE INVASION IN GUATEMALA DURING OR IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE ATTACK. SHOULD ANY PART OF BELIZE REMAIN UNDER GUATEMALAN CONTROL AFTER CEASE-FIRE, THE ATTACK WOULD BE HAILED AS A MAJOR VICTORY AND ALL OF THOSE INVOLVED, FROM LAUGERUD ON DOWN WOULD BE TREATED AS HEROES. SHOULD THE GUATEMALAN FORCES BE UNABLE TO RETAIN ANY TERRITORY, AS A RESULT OF MILITARY DISASTER OR RETREAT, THE CONSEQUENCES WOULD BE MOST SERIOUS FOR THE STABILITY OF LAUGERUD'S GOVERNMENT AND THE INSTITUTIONAL STABILITY OF THE GUATEMALAN ARMY. THAT FACT IS THE MOST POWERFUL MODERATING FORCE ON THE GOG.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: DISPUTE SETTLEMENT, INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENTS, MILITARY CAPABILITIES, INVASIONS, TERRITORIAL CLAIMS, NEGOTIATIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 29-Jun-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 22 May 2009
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977GUATEM04113
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770234-0115
Format: TEL
From: GUATEMALA
Handling Restrictions:
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t1977068/aaaaagtt.tel
Line Count: 472
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
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Message ID: 82053a83-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: LIMDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 9
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: LIMDIS
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 16-Feb-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2236072
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: ASSESSMENT OF GUATEMALAN MILITARY CAPABILITY TO INVADE BELIZE
TAGS: MPOL, PBOR, GT, BH, UK, US
To: STATE DIA
Type: TE
vdkgvkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/82053a83-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009